

## MR. HUXLEY AND AGNOSTICISM

The Principal of King's College  
Taken to Task.

## IGNORANCE AND CREDULITY.

Colonel Ingersoll insists that the Two  
Go Hand in Hand—The Doc-  
trine of Living for This  
World.

## Religious Know-Nothingism.

Robert J. Ingersoll contributes the  
following to the current number of the  
North American Review:

In the February number of the Nineteenth Century is an article by Professor Huxley, entitled "Agnosticism." It seems that a church congress was held at Manchester in October, 1888, and that the principal of King's college brought the topic of Agnosticism before the assembly and made the following statement:

"But if this be so, for a man to urge an escape from this article of belief that he has no means of a scientific knowledge of an unseen world, or of the future, is irrelevant. His difference from the Christian lies, not in the fact that he has no knowledge of these things, but that he does not believe the authority on which they are stated. He may prefer to call himself an Agnostic, but his real name is an older one—he is an infidel; that is to say, an unbeliever. That word, infidel, perhaps, carries an unpleasant significance. Perhaps it is right that it should. It is, and it ought to be for a man, to have to say plainly that he does not believe in Jesus Christ."

Let us examine this statement, putting it in language that is easily understood, for that purpose we will divide it into several paragraphs.

"For a man to urge that he has no means of a scientific knowledge of the unseen world, or of the future, is irrelevant."

Is there any other knowledge than a scientific knowledge? Are there several kinds of knowing? Is there such a thing as scientific ignorance? If a man says, "I know nothing of the unseen world because I have no knowledge upon that subject," is the fact that he has no knowledge absolutely irrelevant? Will the principal of King's college say that having no knowledge is the reason he knows? When asked to give your opinion upon any subject, can it be said that your ignorance of that subject is irrelevant. If this be true, then your knowledge of the subject is also irrelevant.

Is it possible to put in ordinary English a more perfect absurdity? How can a man obtain a scientific knowledge of the unseen world? He certainly cannot obtain it through the medium of the senses. It is not a world that he can visit. He cannot stand upon its shores, nor can he view them from the ocean of imagination. The principal of King's college, however, insists that these impossibilities are irrelevant.

No person has come back from the unseen world. No authentic message has been delivered through all the centuries, not one whisper has broken the silence that lies beyond the grave. Countless millions have sought for some evidence, have listened in vain for some word.

It is most cheerfully admitted that all this does not prove the non-existence of another world—all this does not demonstrate that death ends all. But it is the justification of the Agnostic, who candidly says, "I do not know."

2. The principal of King's college states that the difference between an Agnostic and a Christian "lies, not in the fact that he has no knowledge of these things, but that he does not believe the authority on which they are stated."

Is this a difference in knowledge or a difference in belief—that is to say, a difference in credulity? The Christian believes the Mosaic account. He reverently hears and admits the truth of all that he finds within the scriptures. Is this knowledge? How is it possible to know whether the reputed authors of the books of the Old Testament were the real authors? The scriptures are dead. The lips that could testify are dust. Between these shores roll the waves of many centuries. Who knows whether such a man as Moses existed or not? Who knows the author of Kings and Chronicles? The testimony can we substantiate the authenticity of the prophets, or of the prophecies, or of the fulfillments? Is there any difference between the knowledge of the Christian and of the Agnostic? Does the principal of King's college know any more as to the truth of the Old Testament than the man who modestly calls for evidence? Has not a mistake been made? Is not the difference one of belief instead of knowledge? And is not this difference founded on the difference in credulity? Would not an infinitely wise and good being—where belief is a condition to salvation—supply the evidence? Certainly the Creator would, if such exist—knows the exact nature of the human mind—knows the evidence necessary to convince; and, consequently, such a being would not in accordance with such conditions.

There is a relation between evidence and belief. The mind is so constituted that certain things, being in accordance with its nature, are regarded as reasonable, as probable.

There is also a fact which must not be overlooked; that is, that just in proportion as the brain is developed, it requires more evidence, and becomes less and less credulous. Ignorance and credulity go hand in hand. Credulity understands something of the law of averages, has an idea of probability. It is not swayed by prejudice, neither is it driven to extremes by suspicion. It takes into consideration personal motives. It examines the character of the witnesses—makes allowance for the ignorance of the time—for enthusiasm, for fear—and comes to its conclusion without fear and without passion.

What knowledge has the Christian of another world? The senses of the Christian are the same as those of the Agnostic. He hears, sees, and feels substantially the same. His vision is limited. He sees no other shore and hears nothing from another world.

Knowledge is something that can be imparted. It has a foundation in fact. It comes within the domain of the senses. It can be told, described, analyzed, and in addition to all this, it can be classified. Whenever a fact becomes the property of one mind, it can become the property of the intellectual world. There are words in which the knowledge can be conveyed.

The Christian is not a supernatural person, filled with supernatural truths. He is a natural person and all that he knows of value can be naturally imparted. It is within his power to give all that he has to the Agnostic.

The principal of King's college is mistaken when he says that the difference between the agnostic and the Christian does not lie in the fact that the agnostic has no knowledge, but

that he does not believe the authority on which these things are stated."

The real difference is this: The Christian says that he has the knowledge; the agnostic admits that he has none; and yet the Christian accuses the agnostic of arrogance and asks him how he has the impudence to admit the limitations of his mind. To the agnostic every fact is a torch, and by this light, and this light only, he walks.

It is also true that the agnostic does not believe in the authority of the Christian. What is the authority of the Christian? Thousands of years ago it is supposed that certain men, or, rather, uncertain men, wrote certain things. It is alleged by the Christian that these men were divinely inspired, and that the words of these men are to be taken as absolutely true, no matter whether or not they are verified by modern discovery and demonstration.

Can we know that any human being was divinely inspired? There has been no personal revelation to us to the effect that certain people were inspired—it is only claimed that the revelation was to them. For this we have only the word, and about that there is this difficulty: we know nothing of them, and, consequently, cannot, if we desire, rely upon their character for truth. This evidence is not simply hearsay—it is far weaker than that.

We have only been told that certain things; we do not know whether the persons claiming to be inspired wrote these things or not; neither are we certain that such persons ever existed. We know now that the greatest men with whom we are acquainted are often mistaken about the simplest matters. We also know that the men saying something like the same things, in other countries in ancient days, must have been inspired. The Christian has no confidence in the words of Mohammed; the Mohammedan cares nothing about the declarations of Buddha; and the agnostic gives to the words of the Christian the value only of the truth they contain. He knows that the sayings themselves get their entire value from the truth they express. So that the real difference between the Christian and the agnostic does not lie in the knowledge—for neither of them has any knowledge on this subject—but in the difference of belief in the credulity, and in nothing else. The agnostic does not rely on the authority of Moses and the prophets. He finds that they were mistaken. He finds that their prophecies were not fulfilled. He finds that their prophecies were not fulfilled. He finds that their prophecies were not fulfilled.

In the presence of demonstration there is no opportunity for the exercise of faith. Truth does not appeal to credulity. It appeals to evidence, to establish facts, to the power of the mind. It endeavors to harmonize the new fact with all that we know, and to bring it within the circumference of human experience.

The church has never cultivated investigation. It has never said, "Let him who has a mind to think, think; but its cry from the first until now has been: Let him who has ears to hear, hear."

The pulpit does not appeal to the reason of the pew; it speaks by authority and it not only commands, but it threatens.

The agnostic knows that the testimony of man is not sufficient to establish what is known as the miraculous. We would not believe to-day the testimony of millions to the effect that the dead had been raised. The church itself would be the first to attack such testimony. It is not the church that believes whom we know, why should we believe witnesses who have been dead thousands of years, and about whom we know nothing?

3. The principal of King's college, growing somewhat weary, declares that he may prefer to call himself an Agnostic, but his real name is an older one—he is an infidel, that is to say, an unbeliever.

He is spoken in a kind of holy scorn. According to this gentleman, an unbeliever is, to a certain extent, a disreputable person.

In this sense, what is an unbeliever? He is one whose mind is so constituted that what the Christian believes is not satisfactory to him. Is a person accountable for the constitution of his mind, for the formation of his brain? Is any human being responsible for the nature of his mind? Can he believe without evidence? Is the weight of evidence a question of choice? Is there such a thing as honest weighing testimony? Is the result of such weighing necessary? Does the mind of the unbeliever, who is called a Mosiac account does not convince a man that it is true, is he a wretch because he is candid enough to tell the truth? Can he preserve his manhood only by making a false statement?

The Mohammedan would call the principal of King's college an unbeliever, so would the tribes of Central Africa, and he would return the compliment, and all would be equally justified. Has the principal of King's college knowledge that he keeps from the rest of the world? Has he the confidence of the Infinite? Is there anything praiseworthy in believing where the evidence is insufficient? Is man to be content with believing what his fellow citizens? Were the unbelievers in the pagan world better or worse than their neighbors? It is probably true that some of the greatest Greeks believed in the gods of that nation, and it is equally true that some of the greatest Romans believed in the gods of that nation. If credulity is a virtue now, it must have been in the days of Athens. If to believe without evidence entitles one to eternal reward, certainly the same must have been true in the days of the Pharisees.

An infidel is one who does not believe in the prevailing religion. We now admit that the infidels of Greece and Rome were right. The gods that they refused to believe in were dead. Their thrones are empty and long ago the scepters dropped from their nerveless hands. To-day the world honors the men who denied and derided these gods.

4. The principal of King's college ventures to suggest that "the word infidel, perhaps, carries an unpleasant significance; perhaps it is right that it should."

A few years ago the word infidel did carry an unpleasant significance. A few years ago its significance was so unpleasant that the man to whom the word was applied found himself in prison or at the stake. In particularly kind communities he was put in the stocks, pelted with offal, derided by hypocrites, scorned by ignorances, jeered by cowardice, and all the priests passed by on the other side.

There was a time when Episcopalians were regarded as infidels; when a true Catholic held a false position, as Henry VIII, as an infidel, as an unbeliever; when a true Catholic held in detestation the man who preferred a murderer and adulterer—a man who

swapped religions for the sake of exchanging wives—with the pope, the head of the universal church.

It is easy enough to conceive of an honest man denying the claims of a church based on the caprice of an English king. The word infidel "carries an unpleasant significance" only where the Christians are exceedingly ignorant, intolerant, bigoted, cruel, and unmanly.

The real gentleman gives to others the rights that he claims for himself. The civilized man rises far above the bigotry of one who has been born again. Good breeding is far gentler than "universal love."

It is natural for the church to hate an unbeliever—natural for the pulpit to despise one who refuses to subscribe, who refuses to give, who refuses to contribute to the support of the church. The Episcopal church has the instinct of self-preservation. It uses its power, its influence to compel contribution. It forbids the giving of money to other churches. It is a question of revenue instead of religion. The Episcopal church has the instinct of self-preservation. It uses its power, its influence to compel contribution. It forbids the giving of money to other churches. It is a question of revenue instead of religion.

5. The principal of King's college insists that "it is, and ought to be, an unpleasant thing for a man to have to say plainly that he does not believe in Jesus Christ."

Should it be an unpleasant thing for a man to say plainly what he believes? Can this be unpleasant except in an uncivilized community—a community in which an uncivilized church has authority?

Why should not a man be at free to say that he does not believe as to say that he does believe? Perhaps the real question is whether all men have an equal right to express their opinions. We know now that the greatest men with whom we are acquainted are often mistaken about the simplest matters. We also know that the men saying something like the same things, in other countries in ancient days, must have been inspired. The Christian has no confidence in the words of Mohammed; the Mohammedan cares nothing about the declarations of Buddha; and the agnostic gives to the words of the Christian the value only of the truth they contain. He knows that the sayings themselves get their entire value from the truth they express. So that the real difference between the Christian and the agnostic does not lie in the knowledge—for neither of them has any knowledge on this subject—but in the difference of belief in the credulity, and in nothing else. The agnostic does not rely on the authority of Moses and the prophets. He finds that they were mistaken. He finds that their prophecies were not fulfilled. He finds that their prophecies were not fulfilled.

If a community is thoroughly civilized, why should it be an unpleasant thing for a man to express his belief in respectful language? If the church is against him, it might be unpleasant; but why should simple numbers be the foundation of unpleasantness? If the majority have the facts on their side, why should they fear the mistakes of the minority? Does any theologian hate the man he can answer?

It is claimed by the Episcopal church that Christ was in fact God; and it is further claimed that the church is an inspired account of what that being and his disciples did and said. Is there any obligation resting on any human being to believe this account? Is it within the power of man to determine the truth of that testimony which may have upon his mind?

If one denies the existence of devils, does he, for that reason, cease to believe in Jesus Christ? Is it not possible to imagine that a great evil spirit, living in Palestine nearly twenty centuries ago was misunderstood? Is it not within the realm of the possible that his words have been inaccurately reported? Is it not within the range of the probable that the church has been deceived? Is it not possible that the church has been deceived? Is it not possible that the church has been deceived?

If the man Christ lived and taught, and suffered, if he was, in reality, great and noble, and a friend to all, why should he be attributed to him facts of jugglery or of magic? Why should his miracles be invented by zealous ignorance and believed by enthusiastic credulity?

If he claimed to have wrought miracles, he must have been either dishonest or insane; consequently, he who denies miracles does what little he can to rescue the reputation of a great and splendid man.

The agnostic accepts the good he did, the truth he said, and rejects only that which, according to his judgment, is inconsistent with truth and goodness.

The principal of King's college evidently believes in the necessity of having a religion. He cannot believe in credulity in place of character. According to his idea, it is impossible to win the approbation of God by intelligent investigation and by the expression of honest conclusions. He imagines that the Infinite is delighted with credulity, with belief without evidence, faith without question.

Man has but little reason at best; but this little should be used. No matter how small the taper is, how feeble the ray of light it throws, it is better than darkness, and no man should be rewarded for extinguishing the light he has.

We know now, if we know anything, that man, in this, the nineteenth century, is better capable of judging as to the happening of any event than he ever was before. We know that the standard is higher to-day—we know that the intellectual light is greater—we know that the human race is better equipped to deal with all questions of human interest than at any other time within the known history of the human race.

It will not do to say that "our Lord and his apostles must at least be regarded as honest men." Let us be candid, and what does it prove? Honesty is not enough. Intelligence and honesty must go hand in hand. We may admit now that "our Lord and his apostles" were honest men; yet it does not follow that we have a truthful account of what they said and of what they did. It is not pretended that "our Lord" wrote anything, and it is not known that one of the apostles wrote anything. Let us be candid, and what does it prove? Honesty is not enough. Intelligence and honesty must go hand in hand. We may admit now that "our Lord and his apostles" were honest men; yet it does not follow that we have a truthful account of what they said and of what they did. It is not pretended that "our Lord" wrote anything, and it is not known that one of the apostles wrote anything. Let us be candid, and what does it prove? Honesty is not enough. Intelligence and honesty must go hand in hand. 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